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ABSTRACTS

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They are authors of *Deadly Crop in the Tank Farms,* a five-year study of the Department of Energy's management—or mismanagement, as might be more the case—of high-level waste, based on more than 50,000 pages of Department of Energy documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.)

Weapons-making facilities containing more than 2,000 dump sites for radioactive and hazardous waste dot the U.S. landscape. For the past four decades, a network of 280 facilities at some 20 weapons-making sites, run in secret by the Department of Energy, with almost no oversight from either Congress or environmental agencies, has restored and buried massive quantities of radioactive waste in ways that threaten employees and the public and that are beginning to contaminate public water supplies.

The U.S. government has dumped radioactive waste amounting to a lake the size of Manhattan 40-feet deep directly into the soil and groundwater. High-level nuclear waste tanks at Hanford, Washington, have leaked more than 500,000 gallons of radioactive material. The wastes form explosive gases that could rip the tanks open and spew the material over a large area, creating a Chernobyl-scale accident. The Fernald uranium-processing plant in Ohio has released 374,000 pounds of uranium dust into the air and water.

In 40 years, plants at Hanford and Savannah River (the latter located in an earthquake area!) have produced some 100 metric tons of plutonium (some isotopes of which have half-lives measured in tens of millions of years). (In the words of ex-Energy Secretary John Herrington, "the United States is awash in plutonium.") Experts had predicted that plutonium waste would not reach the water table for one million years, but contamination came about in only 20 years!

Roughly 45 cents of each dollar spent to make bomb-grade material goes toward managing wastes, and the costs of cleaning up these wastes could total $100 billion—far more than was spent to create fissionable materials in the first place. This price is forcing Congress to reconsider the long-term outlook for the nation's nuclear weapons program. The DOE's actions have cast doubt on its commitment to developing an effective cleanup program. States such as South Carolina, Ohio, and Washington are afraid that if nuclear weapons production is cut back, unattended to waste will remain dangerous for thousands and even millions of years. Regardless of how these issues are resolved, the waste that is the legacy of the nuclear arms race will affect surrounding communities for centuries. According to Senator John Glenn, "What good does it do to protect ourselves from the Soviets by building nuclear weapons if we poison ourselves in the process?"

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